



National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

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Record of Decision for Santa Cruz Island Restoration Plan

Channel Islands National Park Acting Superintendent, Terry Hofstra, announces the publication in the Federal Register (V68, N67, P17078) of the Record of Decision for the Santa Cruz Island Primary Restoration Plan Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The Record of Decision completes the planning and public involvement process as mandated by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and National Park Service guidelines.

The National Park Service will implement the Primary Restoration Plan described and analyzed as *Alternative Four (Proposed Action)* contained in the Final EIS. The selected plan features a deliberate, long-term (approximately six years) strategy which entails construction of fenced areas for managing pig eradication efforts, and coordinated use of prescribed burns and herbicide applications to control the highly invasive fennel (a non-native weed species).

The purpose of the Restoration Plan is to protect the unique natural and cultural resources of Santa Cruz Island from continued degradation and to initiate recovery of the island ecosystem by eradicating feral pigs from the island and controlling fennel, a widespread weed. The National Park Service is mandated by Congress to protect natural and cultural features within the parks such as archeological sites and native plants and animals, with special emphasis on threatened and endangered species designated under the Endangered Species Act.

Eradicating pigs and controlling fennel are necessary in order to: 1) protect and initiate restoration of native plant communities; 2) protect threatened, endangered, and rare plant species; 3) protect island foxes through removal of the non-native food source (feral pigs) that supports non-native golden eagles; 4) conserve archeological sites threatened by accelerated erosion and pig rooting, and; 5) initiate conservation and restoration of soils. The actions proposed in this Plan were developed in coordination with The Nature Conservancy, also Santa Cruz Island landowners.

Domestic pigs were introduced to Santa Cruz Island as a food source in the middle 1800's, but quickly escaped and became feral. Feral pigs have a high reproductive potential. Under favorable conditions sows can breed at six or seven months of age and can produce up to two litters per year with as many as ten piglets in each litter. Because pig populations respond to food availability and weather conditions, their numbers on Santa Cruz Island vary from year to

year. Following favorable weather conditions, when food resources are readily available, the pig population on Santa Cruz Island can be over 4,000. Following unfavorable conditions, pig populations can plummet to less than 1,000 animals.

While foraging for food, pigs root through the soil to reach bulbs, roots, and invertebrates. In their attempt to seek food, the pigs damage sensitive archeological sites and plant populations that are unique to Santa Cruz Island. The aftermath of pig rooting resembles a plowed field. It is within these bare and disturbed areas that erosion occurs and fennel, and other weed species, becomes established.

The presence of pigs on Santa Cruz Island is the primary reason for the catastrophic decline in the endemic island fox population at Santa Cruz, Santa Rosa, and San Miguel Islands. Golden eagles have become residents at Santa Cruz Island because of the availability of pigs as a food source. The golden eagles have supplemented their diet with island foxes on Santa Cruz Island and relied almost exclusively on island foxes for food at Santa Rosa and San Miguel Islands. Captive breeding programs for island foxes are on-going at each of those three islands.

Preparation of this plan began in October 1999, when the park solicited comments from the general public, local environmental organizations, and regulatory agencies regarding the project. In February 2001, a Draft Environmental Impact Statement was distributed for review and comment. The Final EIS culminates the environmental analysis process for this project.

The Restoration Plan and the Record of Decision are available from the following sources:

- Online at the Park's website (pdf format): www.nps.gov/chis/restoringsci/island.html
- E.P. Foster Library, in Downtown Ventura, 651 E Main St.
- Santa Barbara City Library, Central Branch, at 40 E. Anapumu St.

Specific questions about the Santa Cruz Primary Restoration Plan may be directed to Kate Faulkner, Chief of Natural Resource Management, Channel Islands National Park (805) 658-5709.

This publication is available on line at: <http://www.nps.gov/chis/press040803.htm>

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